

Taking Care--Documenting the Occupational Culture of Home Care Workers
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2014-2015
(AFC 2014/021: 02026)
Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Rhonda Estrada interview, 2015-05-26 : interview conducted by Nathan J.
Moore and Donald Eugene Stacy**

INTERVIEW LOG

00:00:29 Name is Rhonda Estrada. Lives in Hermiston, Oregon. Has been a home care worker since 2007.

00:00:43 Works mostly as a home care provider for Senior & Disabled Services, but recently became a personal support worker (PSW).

00:01:03 How did you become a home care worker? Worked for migrant Head Start for five years, and a friend asked her to work as a substitute home care provider. The consumer let her friend go and hired her. Then she began to work for Senior & Disabled Services.

00:02:02 Previous jobs - worked in the fast food industry. Caregiving is different because there is more compassion involved. The pace is slower as well.

00:03:00 Special qualities needed? Compassion and patience.

00:03:17 How did you gain your job skills? Became a mother at a young age; has four children.

00:03:37 Typical duties - grocery shopping, helping clients with laundry, taking consumers to medical appointments, providing medication help, housekeeping. Currently has three consumers.

00:04:10 Works 25-30 hours per week.

00:04:20 Do you become close to your consumers? Has known one of her consumers for 25 years, and she does not want anyone else to work for her. They are able to maintain a professional relationship during Rhonda's working hours. Rhonda takes her job very seriously.

00:06:00 She does get to know some of her consumers' family members.

00:07:02 There a lot of caregivers in her area. They get together through the union. Rhonda is very active in SEIU. She helps run meetings in Umatilla County, serves as an alternate on the bargaining team, and serves as a steward.

00:08:06 The union was around when she started working as a caregiver. Went to her first meeting and immediately joined. "SEIU [Service Employees International Union] has been amazing for me." Has traveled to Minnesota and Pennsylvania to help start unions and also attended a leadership conference in St. Louis. Did not know that she was a leader until the union picked her to go. She did not travel at all before becoming a union activist.

00:10:30 Discusses what she tells potential union members when going door-to-door during organizing drives.

00:11:00 Talks about meeting new friends through the union.

00:11:29 Discusses talking to legislators about her work. Had not previously participated in public speaking.

00:12:04 Having a sense of humor on the job is important. She can laugh and joke with one of her current clients.

00:12:46 What you do to relax? Takes care of her family, which is very important to her.

00:13:39 Hardest part of your job? Being a personal support worker (PSW) and working with people with mental disabilities. Rhonda's daughter-in-law is a PSW supervisor and convinced her to become one. The consumers tend to be more challenging than people with physical disabilities.

00:15:05 She recently recruited her daughters into the home care industry. Both of them work in Umatilla County.

00:15:40 Asserts that Umatilla County needs more home care workers. Talks about a client who faced significant health and financial challenges and only receives 20 hours per month of care.

00:18:00 Was on the SEIU bargaining team two years ago. The union received two raises—one from \$10.20 per hour to \$13 per hour and another from \$13 per hour to \$13.75 per hour. Currently fighting for \$15 per hour plus retirement and sick leave pay.

00:18:51 Paid sick leave is very important because home care workers should not get their clients sick. They should have enough time to recover from illnesses. Home care workers get exposed to germs as well. Most of her consumers tell her, though, when they are sick.

00:19:37 Favorite part of the job - taking care of her consumers. She thought she would only be in the field temporarily, but does not want to leave it now. Does want to become a CNA or a nurse someday.

00:20:27 Talks about being a grandmother. Often takes care of her three-year-old granddaughter.

00:22:07 Discusses the similarities between working for Head Start and being a caregiver.

00:22:50 How do you think you were received by legislators when you talked to them about your work? Rhonda told them about her consumer who had to panhandle on the corner for money in a wheelchair, and they were moved by the story.

00:24:31 The future of the field - Thinks that the work should continue. "Caregiving is a field that will never go away." It's sad that consumers sometimes have a hard time getting hours. Thinks that there are a lot of people out there who do not know that they can go into caregiving and receive union benefits. "People just need to know what's out there and we can probably get more caregivers that want to do the caregiving."

00:26:36 Thinks that the "average person" in the community does not always understand what a caregiver does, but once she explains the work, they get it. Many people ask, "How come we don't get the kind of pay you guys get?"

00:27:43 Describes working as a PSW for someone whom she has known for 20 years. He asked her, "How come you're treating me like this? We're friends." She explained that there are rules associated with the job. Also describes strategies that help her interact effectively with her consumer.

00:31:33 End of interview.